

Ready When Christ Returns, Part 1

Luke 17:26-30

Turn to Luke 17 in your Bibles as we continue in our expositional study of the Gospel of Luke. We've had two sermons so far in this text and covering verses 20-25, two sermons on that, and as we begin, we will read those verses again just to remind ourselves of what we have already covered.

Luke 17:20 says this, "Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he," Jesus, "answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, "Look here he is, or there," for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.' And he said to the disciples, 'The days are coming, when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, "Look there" or "Look here.'" Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.'"

We want to follow the rules of grammar when we walk through the text, and we want to consider very carefully the facts of history and all of that is to get the author's intent, to understand the human author's intent and the Spirit's intent in the text in order that we might understand the true meaning of the text. If you don't have the true meaning of the text, you don't have the text.

We started in Luke 17:20 by considering the historical side of that hermeneutic, considering the historical perspective, so we could understand the common, shared perspective that Jesus and the Jews of his nation, that they had about the kingdom of God. We learned that the kingdom of God as a concept started not here or recently to their time frame, but way back in Genesis chapter 1. In Genesis 1:26-28, it was the dominion mandate that God gave to Adam as the federal head of humanity. That's where the kingdom begins. That's where the concept of the kingdom starts, is Genesis 1:26, the dominion mandate.

God gave that to Adam, and Adam failed in his role, failed in his mediatorial role as the ruler over that realm, over the whole earth. Adam failed to exercise a proper rulership in that dominion, a rulership that would be, was to be conducted by simple faith in perfect obedience to God's word and God's law.

So the mediatorial exercise of dominion failed in Adam. He was represented in Israel's history, but failed time and again. And it has waited for the last Adam, Jesus Christ, the Son of David, Israel's Messiah. It's waited to be fulfilled in him.

"Jesus came into the world," John 1:10, "and though the world was made through him, the world did not know him. Jesus came to his own people," verse 11 says, "and his own people," the Jews, they "did not receive them." When the king came to announce the arrival of the kingdom of God to his own people, the evil generation of Jews that he came to, they refused their king. They rejected him, eventually crucified him, and in doing so they rejected the kingdom of God as well.

Soon, Jesus is going, is going to say to the chief priests and the elders, and soon in chronology from our text, soon he's going to say to the chief priests, the elders of the people, in Matthew 21:42, they come to question his authority in Jerusalem, and he says to them, "Have you never read the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" Haven't you read that? "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."

Who are those people? Who are those people? Who are the people producing the fruits of the kingdom of God? Well, back to John's prologue, John 1:12-13, "to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of flesh nor of the will of man, but born of God." Those are the people that produce the fruits of the kingdom. Those who are born again, or better, born from above, born from God. They, and they alone are citizens of the kingdom of God.

The citizens of the kingdom of God are those who are born again, and those who are born again manifest that by producing certain fruits. These Pharisees that we just read about, the ones asking about when the kingdom of God would come, Luke 17:20, they're not born again. They are in the condition of Nicodemus when he first came to Jesus in John chapter 3. They are not born again, and they can therefore not see the king standing before them. They're not citizens of the kingdom because they don't see the king. They don't bow before the King. They don't see the signs of the kingdom. They're not born again. That's the issue.

Since the Pharisees failed to see the true signs of the kingdom, by the way which were replete in Jesus' ministry,

kingdom has been taken from them. No unbelieving, Christ-rejecting sinner will see any further sign. When the kingdom finally does come, they will see no signs when it comes. Jesus said, "The kingdom will come instead, for you, suddenly," without any warning, not subject to human observation. And when the kingdom of God comes, it will arrive suddenly, so there's no time to observe it. It'll arrive supernaturally, not naturally, so it's unpredictable.

The kingdom is going to come defying naturalistic, scientific observation. When the kingdom comes, it'll come defying any historical, social, political predictability. That is, you can't read the headlines and figure it out. As a sudden, supernatural event, it is an unpredictable event. When the kingdom of God comes, when the Son of Man comes in his day, the king and his kingdom will take the world at that time by complete and total surprise.

Turning to his disciples in verse 22, Jesus wants to set expectations for them. He tells them that they themselves, these disciples, will not see even one of the days of the Son of Man, even though they desperately long to. There are going to be plenty of false signs to tempt them, to turn them away after

false messiahs, but they must not go after them. They must not follow.

Jesus will not come, verse 23, privately or provincially, but rather he will come, verse 24, in a way that is universally recognized and seen and known, like lightning that flashes across the sky. They need to realize that following Jesus as disciples, verse 25, they need to realize suffering precedes glory. There's a cross before the crown. So he wants them, he wants us, to be very wary of any theology of triumphalism that teaches us otherwise, that influences us otherwise.

As we turn to verse 26, Jesus tells his disciples about the condition of the human race when the Son of Man returns to earth. This is what the world will look like when the Son of Man comes again. When Jesus comes again, people will be living life as usual, and usual in a fallen world is a fallen usual. The status quo isn't a high bar of righteousness at the time when the Son of Man returns.

You can see that when you look at verse 26. I'm going to read the whole section here to the end, verse 26 to the end. Jesus tells them, “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day

when Noah entered the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

“Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot- they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all- so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife.

“Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. And one will be taken and the other left.’ And they said to him,” verse 37, “Where Lord?’ He said to them, ‘Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.’”

When the flood came, people were not ready. Verse 26, “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.’” That expression, days of Noah, it’s a plural expression, days, also days of Lot, plural expressions, it refers to the activity that characterized those times. And

then those, those days, what characterized those times, that's compared to what will characterize the time of, here's a singular expression, "the day of the Son of Man when he returns."

The grammar Jesus uses here, it's fascinating. He puts those first four verbs in verse 27 in the imperfect tense, and in imperfect tense in the Greek language portrays a continuousness of ongoing activity happening in the past. So instead of, they ate, that's aorist tense, past, just kind of looking at the action as a whole, they ate the meal, it's in the imperfect tense, they were eating the meal. See the difference? So this is an ongoing action in the past, and there's four verbs in the imperfect tense.

Also, in the grammar here, Jesus doesn't separate each of these verbs with a coordinating conjunction, so, conjunction, the word, and. Jesus puts all those verbs in there, but he doesn't separate them with a conjunction, the word, and. The ESV conveys it, adding the, and. "They were eating and drinking and marrying," and that's kind of what we expect in English. We don't like just commas, we like to put the, and, in. Jesus drops the, and, it's a device called asyndeton and it sounds more like this: They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying,

they were being given in marriage. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they bring, were, being given in marriage.

He goes beyond merely identifying the activity, and Jesus wants to convey the pattern of life, the feel of life during those times. He wants, in the way he describes this, us to hear the regularity, the monotony, the rhythmic repetition of everyday life. "They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they're being given in marriage," and it just goes on and on and on and on.

People of Noah's day are portrayed, here, as being occupied with taking care of, first, physical needs, eating and drinking, and then the enjoyment of their sensual pleasures, so it's the taste of food and drink; it's the effect of food, the pleasing of the palette and the saving of the soul; it's the effect of the drink, like wine which gladdens the heart.

Beyond physical and sensual pleasures, the people of Noah's day were also preoccupied with the social and relational aspects of life, those things that revolve around marriage and romance and creating families and building families and enjoying families and all the family gatherings and everything. Your

calendars are all marked with birthdays and uinceaneras and all the different things that happen in life.

The verb, marrying, in the active voice, refers to a male's role; being given in marriage, passive voice, so female's role. So a male and female both caught up in this, on and on pattern of life. The female's role, passive voice, being given in marriage, alludes to the involvement of the entire family in giving away the bride. As we understand weddings, everything leading up to weddings, everything leading up to wedding showers and all the rest, that just involves a lot of planning, a lot of thinking, a lot of giving, a lot of just rejoicing. Social functions like weddings bring families together, involve the community. That causes a celebration, so more food, more drink, more enjoyment. Any of this wrong, by the way? Any of it wrong, sinful? Any of it's, any of this inherently sinful, to eat, drink, marry, be given in marriage. Any of this sinful?

Isn't it interesting that Jesus highlights none of the sins of Noah's day. And were there any? Isn't that the reason the flood came, right? Back in Genesis chapter 6, so you can go there if you're fast enough, but Genesis chapter 6, it's documented early in Genesis 6:1-5, all this is resulting in the flood judgment. Genesis 6:5 says that "the Lord saw the

wickedness of man was great in the Earth, and that every,"
listen to this, "every intention of the thoughts of his heart
was only evil continually."

Wow! I mean, I've had some, even as an unbeliever, I've had
some bad, bad days of sinning, but every thought, every
intention, only evil continually? Not one good thought? Look
down, if you're in Genesis 6, to verse 11. "Now, the earth was
corrupt in God's sight. And the earth was filled with violence.
And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh
had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'I
have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is
filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them
with the earth.'"

But our Lord doesn't even mention the more notorious sins
of Noah's day. In fact, no real sin, per se, in eating, drinking
and being married. All those things are to be enjoyed in the
Lord when received with thanksgiving, right? However, we need to
realize that when that's all your life consists of, or when
that's the primary preoccupation of your life, even when you
dabble in and sprinkle in a little bit of religion, weekly
religion even, service in the church, even; if that's what your
life consists of, if that's what the thoughts and intentions of

your heart are all about, is preoccupied with physical things and social things and family things, then you may be in danger of being one of whom, Paul said in Philippians 3:19, "Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, with minds set on earthly things.

When your God is your belly, ironically, that which you consume, consumes you. Marriage, too, it's a good gift from God, but when marriage, when family, when birthdays and family gatherings, when socializing and celebrating take first place in your life, when they are the priority, and everything else in your life needs to be shuffled around that; look, that can turn into a subtle idolatry, not turn into, it may be a form of subtle idolatry that you need to identify and see as oh, so dangerous. John ended his first epistle saying, "Beloved, keep yourself from idols." Last word in his epistle, to Christians.

Well, going back to Luke 17, the imperfect tenses, the effect of the asyndeton, like the rhythmic sound of a train going down the tracks, clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack, clickety clack, just lulling you to sleep. But then, with the sudden and explosive force of a missile hitting the train, killing everyone, Jesus jars us awake in the middle of verse 27 with a series of aorist tense verbs to remind us all of a past

judgment day. "They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the Ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."

It's sharp, it's strong, it's concise, it's succinct, it grabs your attention. Joel Green, the commentator, says, "The rhythmic repetition of the activities of everyday life are suddenly interrupted by something quite exceptional and cataclysmic. God's judgment breaks inescapably, surprisingly, abruptly into the mundane of life." End Quote.

They were eating, drinking, marrying, and all the while, all the while, like a sword of Damocles hanging above their heads, there was judgment waiting. It's like that picture of Jonathan Edwards, he paints in the *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, repulsive spider at the end of a very thin web, a thread hanging over a fire.

They're completely preocc, they're oblivious to this, oblivious to the danger. They're, they're completely preoccupied with their everyday routines. Business as usual. Even though Noah, even though he's there, the preacher of righteousness, even though he and his sons, they've been next door, and what are they doing next door? Building this massive structure.

Any of you see the ark out in Kentucky area? Amazing. Walk up and see this boat. A hundred and twenty years they're next door, hammering and sawing and nailing and doing everything that they're, building this ark, and no one paid attention. Text doesn't tell us; not, not too hard to imagine this, though, people taking notice of Noah's Ark project in year one, year two, and so on. In the early years, perhaps, we'd guess, people paid some amount of attention. Curiosity had to bring some onlookers around, some inquisitors.

But as the years stretched into decades, no doubt Noah's little carpentry project turned into a complete and running joke. People returned to their own complacency, returned back to the rhythmic repetition of daily life, enjoying their pleasures, enjoying their comforts, rejoicing in life, liberty, the pursuit of their own happiness. Seemed to have escaped their notice when God brought the animals to Noah's ark in pairs. Seemed to, they seemed to ignore Noah and his family while they were packing the ark with all their belongings and then disappearing inside, never to be seen again.

After God shut the door on the ark, "on that day," Genesis 7:11, "on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth." Geological destruction on a scale we've never seen. The

map and the terrain shows it. We go out and see geological formations here on our Front Range in Colorado, and we can see the flood geology of a plates of, of sediment stacked up and then shoved up and turned into red rocks. So we turn and make an amphitheater out of it. We enjoy music there, and we fail to realize we're sitting in judgment.

I tell people that all the time. I love driving around and seeing the beauty. I love the beauty of our, of our country. Absolutely love it. I'm so thankful for this country, how God's blessed it, for the national parks that he's given. But you know what makes those national parks, Yellowstone, Bryce Canyon, Grand Canyon, you know what makes them so spectacular? Judgment. We think this is beautiful, and it's a cursed, judged earth. We have no imagination to understand what the original design looked like. If we think this is beautiful, imagine what the first looked like. Imagine what it's going to look like when there's a new heavens and a new earth.

Fountains of the great deep burst forth, tearing tectonic plates out of their way as the water shot up, just breaking the canopy above. And then the water, the windows of the heavens, it says in Genesis 7:11, they opened, the rain fell, the flood continued for 40 days, 40 nights. It drowned the entire earth in

water. Says in verse 23, that God blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left and those who were with him in the ark.

Our friends over at Answers in Genesis estimate the earth's population in Noah's day could have been 750 million people at the low end. 750 million people. Considering the extremely long lifespans of the people who lived at that time, think Methuselah 969 years, Noah 950, the population may have been way beyond that, maybe closer to four billion people on the earth. It's quite a ratio, isn't it? Saved to lost. Jesus summarizes this episode very succinctly in verse 27, the flood came, *kataklysmos*, the cataclysm came and *apollymi pantas*, the cataclysm destroyed them all. When the flood came, the people were not ready.